

Dysentery 3 Vol

#6

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March 6.

3 An.

Essay on —

Dysentery —

Thomas Page

admitted March 17. 1821

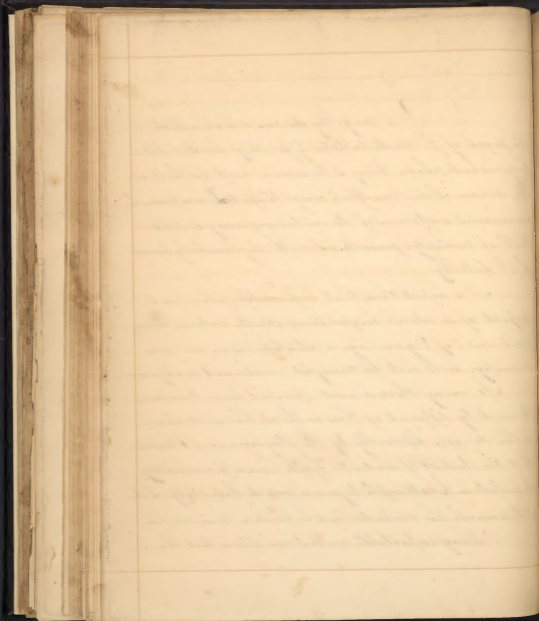
James P. ...
... 1851

Among the diseases which affect the people of the United States Dysentery holds a distinguished place. Every Physician meets with it in the course of his practice, every Hospital can furnish numerous instances of its existence, every weekly bill of mortality, presents us with melancholy proofs of its fatality.

It is hoped then, that a few observations on a subject of so much importance, as the nature, cause, and cure, of Dysentery, as it appears in our own country, will not be thought irrelevant or obtuse.

So many theories and opinions have been maintained by different authors on the nature and cause of the disease, especially by the Physicians of Europe, that the Student of medicine finds himself completely defeated in his attempts to gain a correct knowledge of it, or to reconcile the contradictions he finds in their works.

Many respectable writers maintain that the

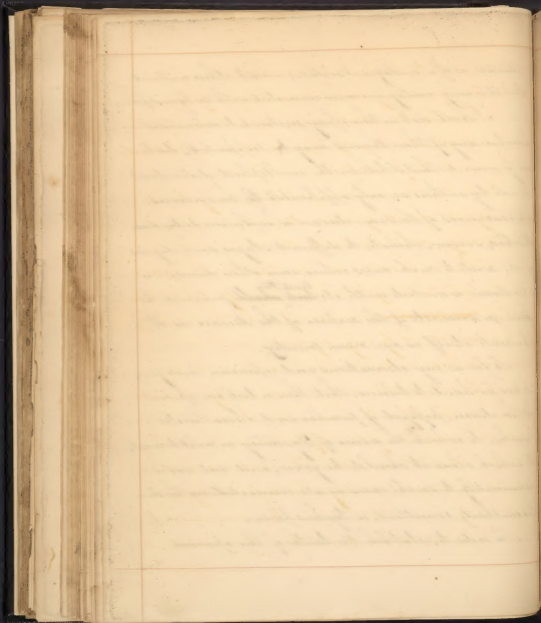


disease is of a contagious nature; whilst others contend that it is only contagious when connected with Malignant fever.

I shall not in this essay pretend to determine how far any of these theories may be supported, but only remark that I believe the multiplied distinctions made by authors are only applicable to the various appearances of the same disease as influenced by constitution, season, climate, to different stages, and degrees of it; and to such cases where some other disorder or epidemic is united with it; ~~but~~ ^{and they} proceed to give an account of the nature of the disease as it presents itself in our own country.

So far as my observations and experience have gone, I am inclined to believe, that there is but one species of the disease, possessed of peculiar and characteristic marks, to which the name of Dysentery is right belong, to which alone it should be given; and not indiscriminately to such cases as are connected with intermittent, remittent, or typhus fever.

In order to establish the truth of this opinion



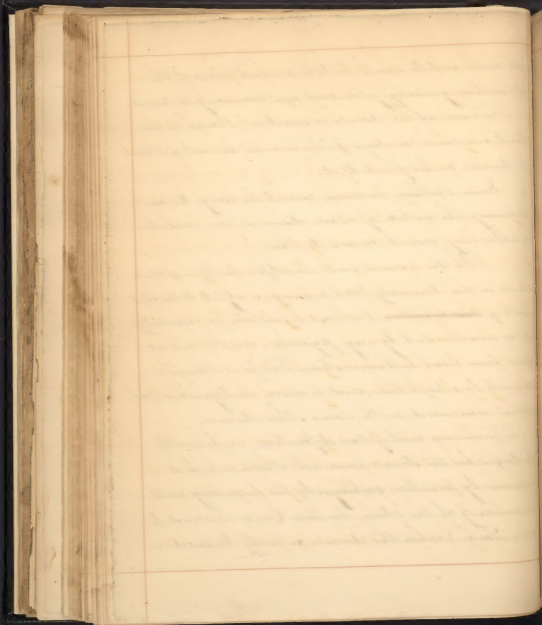
it will not be amiss to take a short view of the definition generally given and most commonly received.

The name of the disease in question, though in constant use since the days of Hippocrates has not yet had its precise value fixed to it.

Even Cullen, however correct he may be in defining the nature of other diseases, has failed in attaching correct views to this.

With the learned and scientific professor of Medicine in this University, Dr. Chapman, I object to the first part of ~~the definition~~ Cullen's definition, for frequently it is unattended by any pyrexia, except such as arise from local inflammation. The fever therefore cannot be idiopathic, and is never contagious except when combined with some other disease.

The remaining part of this definition sufficiently distinguishes the disease from all others, which is known by peculiar gripings, by the frequency and peculiarity of the stools, for these (as is observed by Mrs. Nasty) when the disease is fully formed -



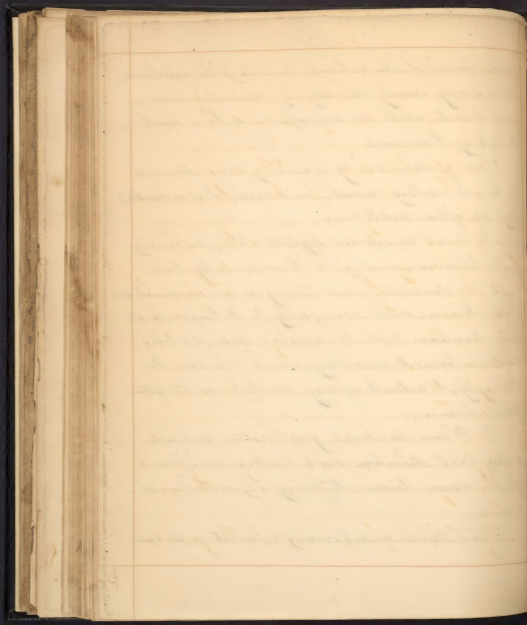
never consist of the natural contents of the intestines, but in a very scanty discharge of mucus, serum, and blood, and are accompanied by a most distressing tenesmus.

Some of these are symptoms of other diseases of the alimentary canal, for which (it is no doubt) they are often mistaken.

The want of copious liquid stools, the severity of the tenesmus, and of the tenesmus, together with the duration and other general circumstances of the disease, will serve fully to distinguish it from diarrhoea. While the copious liquid stools and continued vomiting, mark cholera, too strongly, to admit of any mistake in the attentive observer.

Some medical gentlemen pretend to say that diarrhoea and cholera are species of the same disease differing only in violence of action.

That I think is sufficiently refuted in the case



of Cholera by the rapidity with which it hastens
to a fatal termination, unless checked by a mode
of treatment, the opposite of that which is cal-
culated to cure, except in Dysentery.

Of the causes of Dysentery

Various have been the opinions
of authors respecting the cause of Dysentery.
By some it has been supposed to arise from a
Species of contagion generated in the body of one
individual and by him imparted to others.

By others, it is supposed to arise from the ab-
sence evacuations, from the stagnant secretions,
and exertions.

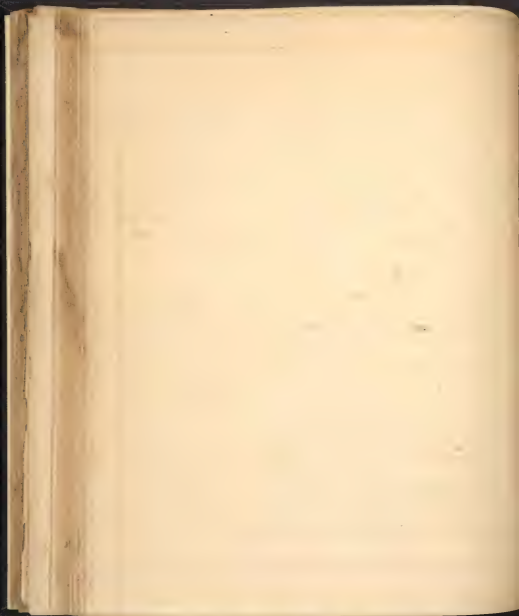
But by a careful perusal of the writings
of modern authors, it can be said to be incorrect
to say it will not be found to answer the true char-
acter of the disease. But when Dysentery prevails
as a contagious disease it arises from its combi-
nation with Typhoid fever, as stated by Willis,
Harty and Chapman & the latter gentleman



tells us that when contagion is the cause of this disease,
there is but one uniform description of the
action, or at least not more diversified than might
be expected from pecuniarity of constitution or the
grade of force with which the attack was made.
Whereas, if the disease arose from the alvine evacua-
tions, the secretions, and excretions, it should
be as diversified as the causes from which it
derived its origin.

He further states, that it has been clearly shewn
that Dysentery when contagious may be propagated
though the utmost care be taken as regards cleanli-
ness in all respects. What then are we to conclude
(continues he) except that in the lymhus state
of this disease, the extreme vessels take on an
action by which the contagious matter is
eliminated and eliminated out of the system.

Dysentery may arise from other causes. By some
it is alluded that it is occasioned by the same
remote or occasional cause as intermittent fever is



conjunction with the application of cold to the
surface of the body. In support of this opinion,
they appeal to the circumstances of both dis-
eases occurring in similar situations, such as
coming epidemic about the same season of
the year. But the circumstances in the weather
are exactly the reverse of them in which Quinsy
makes its appearance; for, we generally find in-
termittents arising from a long continuance of wet
weather, succeeded by drought and great heat.
Quinsy, quinsy, seldom becomes epidemic, but
arises long course of wet and dry weather, and
dew, succeeded by cold, and wet. Hence the Body
becomes relaxed in consequence of the increase heat,
which, being succeeded by cold, and wet, a sharp
resistance of the subcutaneous vessels is
induced, determining the fluids to the internal
parts, by which determination the internal coat
of the subcutaneous receives such an additional
quantity of blood as produces inflammation and



its consequences.

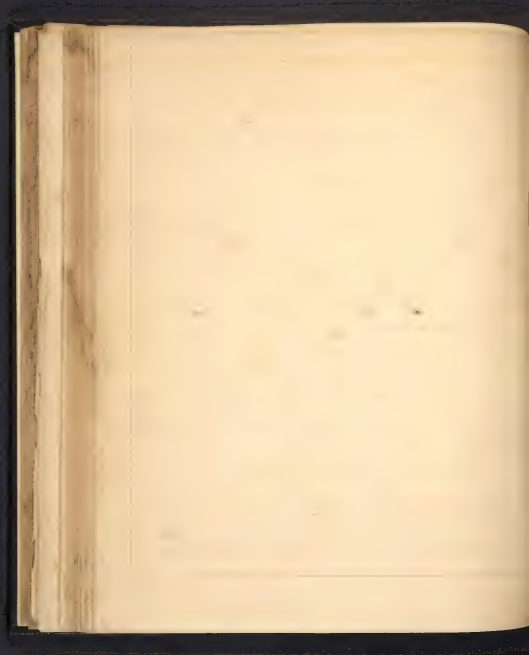
I now believe that we may consider the
morbid cause to be an inflammation of these parts,
connected with a preternatural constriction of the colon,
whereby the faeces are retained.

There is a fixed position, various occasions
in exciting causes, besides those already mentioned
may exist, such as acrid matter taken into the
Stomach, acrid injections, irritation from worms,
and lastly any thing whatever, that may have
the tendency of producing inflammation in the
intestines.

Of the cure of Dysentery

We now become necessary to consider
the mode of treatment which appears to be the best
and that to be our present design.

It is now considered to generally to be a
disease of an inflammatory nature, which if
considered, the indications of curative sufficiently
obvious, viz. to remove inflammation,

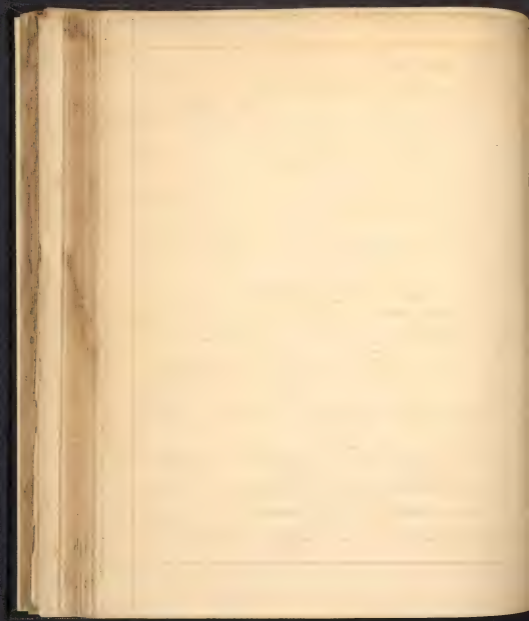


together with the stimulus which is attended
to, to remove the obstruction of the alimentary canal,
and thereby procure natural evacuations; and to res-
tore, to the surface of the body which is hot and dry,
its usual and healthy condition.

It was formerly the practice in this disease,
to commence the cure with an emetic; But, as
there is always some or less inflammation of the mu-
cous membrane, or villous coat of the intestines in
the early, or recent state of this disease, similar to
that which occurs in the bronchia in catarrh, blood
letting in the generality of cases should be resorted to.

The cases in which emetics are particularly
useful are those in which the stomach is loaded with
and other local circumstances, occasioning nausea
and other gastric uneasiness.

In regulating the quantity to be abstrahed and the
repetition of the remedy in dysentery, the pain
as in cases of Dysentery is often a very concurring guide,
for, in both diseases, it is usually small and low.



But very acute and frequent, gripping pain in the abdomen, previous to, and during every evacuation, access, joined with painful tenesmus, are signs for the employment and repetition of this remedy.

Therefore while these symptoms continue, it will be necessary to repeat the remedy every few hours until a manifest abatement of the local pain and distension is procured.

Abolishing in the early stages of this disease is a two-fold indication; for, it not only checks the progress of inflammation but likewise opens a new & favorable avenue to the operation of other remedies. The professor of the Faculty of Medicine in this University tells us, that, of all the means by which a susceptibility to the action of remedies may be produced, emersion is the most effectual. And as affections of the alimentary canal are essentially characterized by the want of this susceptibility to the operation of Medicines; the laudanum,



in these cases is imperiously demanded;

The further states, that, independent of the reasons just stated, there is another motive for copious and early blood-letting in Dysentery. In connection with the affection of the bowels, there is commonly a degree of Spasmodic constriction which is productive of much pain, and opposes an insuperable barrier in many cases to evacuation of the bowels. To overcome this constriction or spasm, in some cases, opium is introduced, joined, and with the removal of the spasm, serves also as a remedy for the hot and dry surface which it exchanges for one moist and relaxed.

In conjunction with blood-letting, we used to judge it to be one of the best of those violent remedies in relieving the irritation of dysentery, generally in the practice of administering Castor-oil, which undoubtedly answers very well in the ancient form in which this drastic sometimes presents itself; but, it should be administered



with a liberal sweat.

The common purging Salts, have been recom-
mended with the addition of op. powder, or some
small grain of tartariz'd tartariz'd, to be ad-
ministr'd soon after the first bleeding, and the
course of a full dose every two hours after,
with the addition of a fourth, or a sixth part
of a grain of emetic tartar to each dose. Till
the first pain is removed, and some copious
and natural stools are evacuat'd.

But as regards Dysentery as it occurs in our
own country, I am fully persuaded the most
expedient and promising remedy. They are
the least probable to be cur'd, unless
suddenly rais'd through the bowels, making a
great and sudden pain, as to remove it, scarcely any
of the circumstantious matters, when or how
administr'd alone or in combination with
secretions or joints, generally prove a failure and
of great surgical use in Dysentery.



Wh' case it should linger in the bowels, it will
become necessary to resort to the use of evacuations.

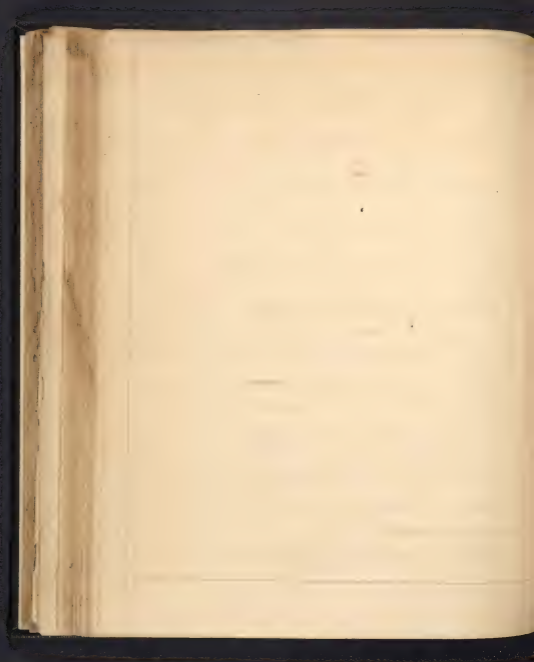
After we have thus, inserted an evacuation
from the bowels, we may keep them open, by gentle
laxatives until the evacuations become natural.

As we have said at different times, con-
cerning the exhibition of opium in this disease.

By the older practitioners it was considered
as dangerous when administered in the early stages,
but practitioners of this country, are in the habit
of resorting to it much earlier and with very
happy results, yet it becomes necessary to unite
it with some evacuating ~~and~~ medicine.

In this purpose the oil and some of the
Saline purgatives answer very well, but
what I think to be still better is a combina-
ion with calomel. In this way the opium
subdues the irritation, whilst the calomel op-
erates as a gentle cathartic.

After the inflammatory symptoms have been



reduced by depleting, sooner, it becomes nece-
sary for us to turn our attention to the cutaneous
secretion, which is generally suppressed in a situa-
tion to its healthy condition we resort to diapho-
retics. Among these antimonial wine combined
with tartarum, has been given, and attended
with very happy results.

Stimulus powder has been very rightly selected,
in consequence of its, for helping the advantage of opening
the bowels if properly administered, and it is never
seldom found to excite a plentiful sweat.

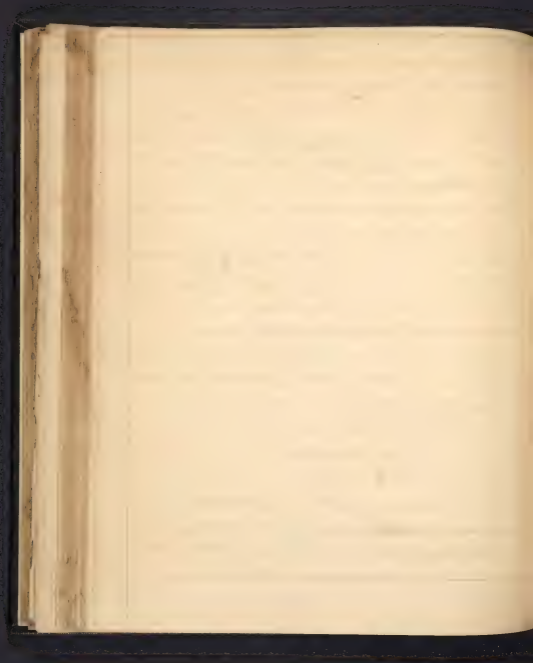
But what answers a kindly well combined
tion of opium, spicacuanha, and Colomel, recom-
mended by Dr. Chapman in the following, regulating

℞ opium ʒij

Colomel ℥i

Spicacuanha ʒij

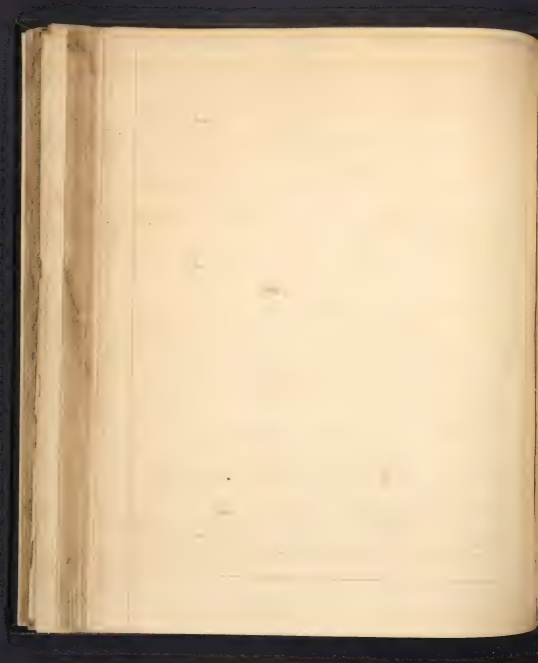
to be made into eight pills a powder, one of
which is to be ~~given~~ given every 2, 3 or 4 hours as circum-
stances may require. The Dr. does not consider



It is, among the most active diaphoretics, and
is considered of induction of very happy effects.
It combines subliminal insolation, relaxes the
surface of the body, gently opens the bowels,
and causes other inspirations, which though
not very intelligible are essentially salutary in
these consequences.

The above prescription is more particularly adapted
to adults, for in children necessary should be ad-
ministered with a cautious hand, in consequence
of the situation of the viscera and sometimes of
the bowels which has been known to take place
and terminate in diarrhoeas by the too liberal
use of this medicine.

Various external applications have been
recommended in this disease, such as the warm-
bath, and fomentations of warm water to the
abdomen, and legs, which frequently are found
to mitigate the pain and other distressing symptoms.
In addition to these remedies if the pain continues



obstinate, the application of cups, leeches, and, more especially blisters, to the abdomen, and inside of the thighs, will be found highly useful.

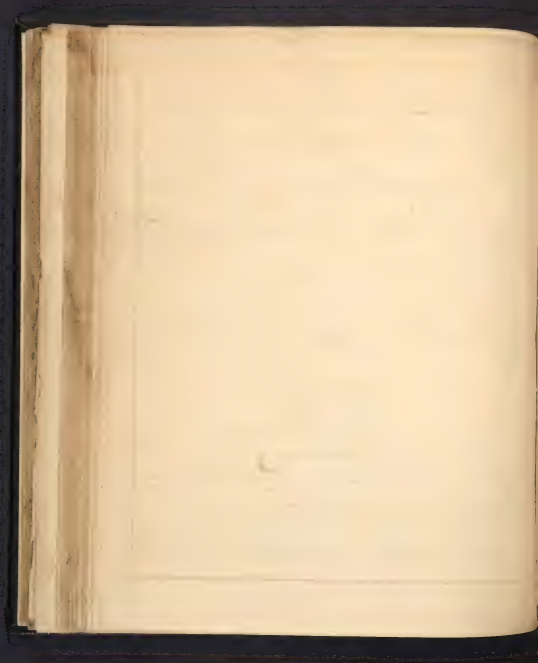
To relieve those disagreeable local affections, more exactly attend throughout the complaint, medicinal injections, will often be necessary. They may consist of glass distilled water, barley water, or a solution of Gum Arabic, or a solution of Sacchar.

If the pain and the hemorrhagic discharges, with a great accumulation in the bowels, the following mixture may be used with advantage.

Oil of Castor oil . ℥i
Gum turba ℥ij
Sulphur ℥ij
Sarcocolla ℥i
Vine of Opium ℥ij

If in a full dose it should not be taken every 1, 2, or 3 hours as occasion may require.

For the relief of the hemorrhage which arises suddenly, will is an injection composed of Gum Tragacanth,



to a pint of melted butter, or lard, free from
salt and acridity. This may be repeated every
three or four hours, or oftener as circumstances
may require.

Emollient injections are highly useful, but
what answers still better, is from three to four grains
of opium inserted into the rectum, this produces very
little irritation, and as much benefit may be derived
from it, as if taken into the stomach or administered
any other way.

Before closing this imperfect dissertation, it remains
for me, to consider the diet proper to the modern Dysentery.

As the disease is of an acute, and inflammatory
nature we should select those articles, which
are the least irritating and offensive to the stomach.
They should consist of mild, mucilaginous, and
demulcent drinks, such as barley water, rice water,
mucilage of gum Arabic, flaxseed tea, sago, &c.

The article of clothing is of considerable importance.
The patient should be well wrapped in the skin with

[Faint, illegible handwriting on a lined page, likely bleed-through from the reverse side.]

the addition of a ^{dry} paper several times around
the ~~body~~ abdomen with some degree of tightness.

This promotes perspiration, and gives support
to the weakened parts.

There may be, no doubt, slight variations in
the treatment of this disease as adapted by different
practitioners. The pathology however, being established,
and the indications made certain, little needs be
said in apology for not having swelled the
number of pages in this dissertation.

